

Introduction to Twentieth-Century Literature

tcl17.blogs.rutgers.edu

Prof. Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)
(Murray 019, Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30–4:30)

April 12, 2017. Achebe (4).

the matter of colonialism

- ▶ writing back
 - ▶ rich representation against colonialist narrowness
 - ▶ cultural sense-making against condescension
 - ▶ Okonkwo's excess redeems the culture?
- ▶ ambivalences
 - ▶ internal critique (twins, the women)
 - ▶ technological modernity ("iron horses")

the missionaries

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive...And for the first time they had a woman [convert]. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. (151)

...

He [Okonkwo] had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka—"Mother is Supreme"—out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen. (162)

the missionaries

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive...And for the first time they had a woman [convert]. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. (151)

...

He [Okonkwo] had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka—"Mother is Supreme"—out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen. (162)

Mr. Kiaga stood firm. (157)

the missionaries

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive...And for the first time they had a woman [convert]. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. (151)

...

He [Okonkwo] had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka—"Mother is Supreme"—out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen. (162)

Mr. Kiaga stood firm. (157)

He had just sent Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was now called Isaac, to the new training college for teachers in Umuru. (182)

the missionaries

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive...And for the first time they had a woman [convert]. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. (151)

...

He [Okonkwo] had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka—"Mother is Supreme"—out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen. (162)

Mr. Kiaga stood firm. (157)

He had just sent Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was now called Isaac, to the new training college for teachers in Umuru. (182)

1. Identify the motive: what is the problem Quayson addresses?
2. Now locate a major argumentative claim about the novel: how do you know?
3. Think about Quayson's reading of evidence: can we carry his interpretation further or critique it?

motive

All these critical formations in relation to Achebe's work can be perceived as united in subtle maneuvers that take the culture of the realist novel as most truthfully inscribing the space and time of history. (122)

This reading of *Things Fall Apart*, then, is offered as a means of exposing the gap that exists between the realist African text and the reality that it is seen to represent. (125)

Reading "culture" out of a novel is valuable but inadequate. (133)

argument (dialectical synthesis)

Things Fall Apart thus explores a loving image of Umuofia at the same time as it reveals a dissatisfaction with the values of the society it describes in such detail. And this is undertaken at a more subtle level than the mere explication of content can reveal. (133)

I agree with him and add that the very choice of the metropolitan language for the writing of post-colonial literatures secretes liminality into the inaugural act of post-colonialist representation itself. (124)

epigraph

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight:

It did not occur to him [Achebe] that he was the first great African writer in the English language...Shortly afterwards he came to London on a course at the BBC. He showed it [TFA] to his course officer who sent it round to Heinemann's Heinemann's normal fiction reader read it and did a long report, but the firm was still hesitating whether to accept it. Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There were no precedents.

Alan Hill, interviewed by Kristen Holst Petersen in 1990, rpt. in *Things Fall Apart*, ed. F. Abiola Irele (New York: Norton, 2009), 148–49.

▶ Why history?

next

- ▶ Coetzee, “The Novel in Africa”
- ▶ Ngũgĩ, “Wedding at the Cross”
- ▶ Head, “The Deep River”
- ▶ “Pop” quiz (basic biographical facts plus the texts themselves)